

to take steps to disarm the militias, pursue extremist groups, and start delivering Iraqi Security Forces to protect Baghdad. It requires the Iraqi government to fairly share oil revenues, ensure that elections are free and fair, and begin to responsibly allocate and spend Iraqi government funds to rebuild the nation of Iraq.

If the Iraqi government does not take action to disarm the militias, and has not taken steps towards political reconciliation and responsibility for its own security by July of this year, Americans will begin to come home, and will be out of Iraq within 180 days. Most importantly, under this bill, American combat troops will begin to leave Iraq by March 2008, and will be out of Iraq by August of 2008.

This is not the bill that many of us want, but it is the best bill we are likely to get, and I am going to support it.

It is not a perfect bill. But it is a step in the right direction—towards ending the war. I urge my colleagues to join me in voting for this bill, and for a timeline for withdrawal from Iraq. This war has cost us 3,225 American lives to date and almost half a trillion dollars. It's time for a new direction. It's time for our troops to come home.

TRIBUTE TO DR. GRANVILLE
COGGS, MEMBER OF THE UNITED
STATES ARMY AIR CORPS

HON. CHARLES A. GONZALEZ

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 28, 2007

Mr. GONZALEZ. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Dr. Granville Coggs, member of the United States Army Air Corps, also known as the Tuskegee Airmen, on the occasion that the leadership of the United States Congress and the President of the United States presents to him the Congressional Gold Medal.

The prestige and honor exemplified by this medal could not be more appropriate for a man of Dr. Coggs's stature. As a nation, we will forever be grateful for his service to our country from 1943 to 1946 as a member of the segregated Black United States Army Air Corps. It was here that Dr. Coggs was a member of the historic World War II fighter group known as the Tuskegee Airmen and earned military badges for aerial gunner, aerial bombardier and multi-engine pilot.

Upon completion of his service, Dr. Coggs received his bachelor of science degree from the University of Nebraska in June of 1949. In June of 1953, he received his M.D. degree from Harvard Medical School, and has since had a celebrated career in medicine of the highest merit.

Dr. Coggs's accomplishments are worthy of the honor represented by the Congressional Gold Medal and of equal importance, they are worthy of the praise and recognition of the American people. The role he has played in our country's history during one of its most difficult and trying times will never be forgotten. His desire to serve the country that he loves so dearly, and to do so at a time when many in our country doubted the skill, intelligence, and patriotism of our African-American citizens, personifies the words bravery, valor, and courage.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring Dr. Granville Coggs and his

fellow Tuskegee Airmen today as they receive the highly celebrated Congressional Gold Medal. We will forever be grateful to the role they have played in shaping our nation's history and for playing an integral role in the fight for social justice and racial equality in our Nation.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW MIDDLE
EAST INITIATIVE

HON. FRANK R. WOLF

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 28, 2007

Mr. WOLF. Madam Speaker, I would like to share with our colleagues information on a new initiative for the Middle East that will combine economics and faith. Ambassador Dennis Ross, of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and former presidential negotiator in the Middle East, and Ambassador Tony Hall, who served in Congress from 1979 to 2002, will be key players in the initiative. The initiative will be coordinated by the Center for the Study of the Presidency and be supported by a grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development.

I submit for the RECORD my remarks, as well as those of Ambassador Tony Hall, at a press conference on March 22 at which this initiative was announced.

FRANK WOLF'S REMARKS BEFORE THE MARCH
22, 2007 PRESS CONFERENCE ON NEW MIDDLE
EAST INITIATIVE

Thank you for coming today. I also want to thank and recognize Ambassador David Abshire and Ambassador Tony Hall for joining me today. Both will be speaking in a few minutes. I have known and worked with both David and Tony for a number of years and have great respect for them. And I can honestly say that Tony was my best friend in Congress and remains my best friend today.

Today we are here to announce the launching of a new initiative in the Middle East that will combine economics and faith. It will be coordinated by the Center for the Study of the Presidency and be supported by a grant from USAID. We are deeply concerned that time is running out to find a peaceful solution to the issues that separate the people in the land so many call holy.

In the Middle East, religion plays such an important role in people's lives. If you're Jewish, you have the Western Wall. If you're Christian, you have the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. If you're Muslim, you have the Dome of the Rock. We cannot work toward peace in the Middle East without taking into account the religious roots of its people.

The U.S. government doesn't have the capacity to deal with this reality in the lives of those who live in that region. That is why I have put together an initiative that includes the faith component. The faith component of this initiative will be led by former Congressman Tony Hall. His depth of faith and experience in building bridges between people is critical to this initiative.

The economic development component will be led by Ambassador Dennis Ross. Dennis is a seasoned diplomat who has maintained a significant role in shaping U.S. involvement in the Middle East peace process for many years.

Dr. Bob Cooley, president emeritus of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, recently provided me some insightful observations about the faith dynamics in the Middle East. He has worked with Palestinian Muslims,

Palestinian Christians, and Israelis during his 48 years of pursuing Hebrew Studies and Syro-Palestinian Archeology.

He points out that the three major religious groups in the land are "all Sons of Abraham, who share a common understood relationship that serves as a basis for living together in harmony today." It is largely the past 50 years of failed politics that have undermined communal harmony in the region and modified the relationships between these groups. A complete copy of Dr. Cooley's remarks about the relationships between these groups is attached to my statement.

The faith dynamic in the region is critical to forming the most effective approach to the political situation. If you buy a young plant, you can't place it in the ground without tilling the soil first. The purpose of this initiative isn't to deal with boundaries, or questions of status. It is to build relationships; to prepare the soil in preparation for the diplomatic efforts of Secretary Rice and others to find a political solution for the region.

Psalm 122:6 tells us to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem." I do this every day. I believe that this initiative will bring the people of different faiths together and build bridges between them. Now I am going to turn the program over to Dr. Abshire and then Tony. We will take any questions after both of them speak. Thank you.

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR TONY HALL AT
MIDDLE EAST PRESS CONFERENCE ON MARCH
22, 2007

I am very pleased to be part of this initiative headed by my friend, Frank Wolf, and supported by other members of the Congress and Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice.

As His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan so clearly spelled out two weeks ago to the Congress, the unresolved conflict between Israel and Palestine has resulted in tremendous pain in Israel, the Palestinian territories and other nations in the Middle East. This problem has fueled additional fires outside of the region that have brought fear, destruction and extremism to many countries and people, including our own. The situation is at such a point that it is no longer only an isolated regional conflict in which we can choose to be involved, it is a problem that directly affects the security of the United States.

I have traveled a number of times to the Middle East, starting in 1979, and most recently having returned from there this past week. We did a lot of listening; and what I have seen and heard leads me to believe that there has not been a more urgent time for peace. There are a lot of people already working on multiple fronts in waging peace, and my role in the coming months will be to support them by fostering additional relationships, understanding, and cooperation among the various communities in the Holy Land.

I want to clarify that my mission is not to distract from the political side of the peace process, but to lay additional groundwork for an eventual political outcome. However, one cannot speak about peace on the political level without taking into account the religious roots of the people involved—especially in the Holy Land.

Our service is to support and encourage the people of faith who bear influence in the region. We are connecting with people of faith because as leaders of these communities they can either encourage the way of compassion, sacrifice, and grace in this process—which is necessary to support a political outcome—or they can incite their people in the hopeless path of the status quo. We want to help the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities who recognize and labor for peace